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Adrift

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Adrift

by

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Thesis

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Abstract

Adrift

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The expected makes me uncomfortable.

I find my seed in belonging; I find my intention within the paradox of “being” versus “longing.” Through my journey to India, I have observed I feel most comfortable when I am adrift. Within this culminating installation *Adrift*, there is a focus on contrast and how that embodies true calmness. Shunryu Suzuki says, “Calmness of mind does not mean you should stop your activity. Real calmness should be found in activity itself.” Using this intimately immense concept while focusing on the contrast it naturally creates, this performative installation was my visual journey of be-longing.

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Is home where one begins or where one ends?

January 29th, 2016

"Traveling is IT

It is everything

It is beauty

Wonder

Life

Art

It makes me beyond excited to be

A human in this world

Of diversity yet

Universality

The rivers

Channels

Cracks

That connect us

The veins of the world

The water as a path

And map

And boundary

Yet loose

Malleable

And ever changing

Adapting

Travel."

(Vidic, *Traveling*)

The unanswerable question, "Why did I go to India?" A question I cannot escape. I had known for years that I would travel to India, yet could never accept the pure intuitive impulse. I believed I should backup the choices I made with

logic. I continued to struggle with understanding and practicing the impulses that came from within. Irwin has said, "Renaissance man tells the world what he finds interesting about it and then tries to control it. I took to waiting for the world to tell me so that I could respond. Intuition replaced logic" (Weschler 77). My travel along the southwest coast of India the summer of 2016 began the confidence in myself to pursue my unconscious choices. The unanswerable question, "Why did I go to India?"

When I returned, I didn't feel immediately different. I was exhausted and spent two weeks on a couch in New York City in a state of confusion. I let the experience sink in and stopped thinking about this supposedly epic journey that came and went in a flash. In returning to Austin, Texas, I still did not feel a spark of artistry. Instead I was faced with a lot of questions from others about my trip and my personal expectation to give an incredibly enlightened response. "How is this going to turn into your thesis?" In that moment, I felt as if my head was submerged in a bathtub; my face above the water, observing the world around with my ears underwater hearing a muffled and distant drone. I, again, did not have an answer. I had a hard time responding to the simplest questions like how my trip went or what I did when I was there. Being in India brought up so many queries and felt so foreign that capturing that experience in an everyday conversation seemed impossible. I wanted to explain those six weeks but kept hitting personal and emotional blocks. I truly felt I owed an explanation to my closest peers and colleagues and therefore decided to write a narrative encompassing my journey.

I'm not fond of writing and have little confidence in my abilities, but it felt clear to use that form of artistry. A year ago, when I decided I was going to India, I was pushed by Richard Isackes to journal and observe my preconceived thoughts of India and continue my thoughts while there. The two journals full of stream of conscious scribbles became my artifacts. Between an unfortunate concussion and a month of preparation with the generous help of a colleague

and playwright, Drew Paryzer, I ended with the performance *Traveling is IT: My Story of India*, September 2016.

Excerpts from *Traveling is IT: My Story of India*

A List of What Makes Me Feel SAFE: June 3, 2016

- Being in a car/cab – inside looking out – opposed to being on the street*
- When service men wear all white – wear a uniform*
- Being on a train car with all women – opposed to on the platform with men*
- Names/terms that are British*
- Staying in a house with a family – opposed to alone in a hotel*
- NO eye contact*
- Clean outfits – nice fabrics*
- Kids/families*
- People my age*
- Shrines to deities in a home/hotel or car*
- Coffee/coffee shops*

June 7, 2016

It seems every big trip I go on – I remained attached to a human.

It's as if to travel, I need a thread of stability.

I don't feel stable.

I don't feel safe.

But I still think travel is important?

Have I ever felt stable?

Or is that why I've always felt drawn to traveling?

The Ashram

One Sunday evening we had a special satsaang (meditation and chanting) in a beautiful temple on the property. The meditation was the same, but the chanting turned into a repetition of a mantra that involved picking up red powder from a banana leaf and putting it on another banana leaf that contained a brass candle burning. Afterwards, we were to collect our Prasad, or a sweet. I got in line to receive the Prasad, but noticed the others were doing a type of ritual that involved cupped hands and oil and placing your hands above your head. By this time I had been to many different temples and understood this feeling that came over me while inside. I would feel like an outsider looking in, that every step I took was wrong or offensive, the feeling that I didn't belong. My solution was to watch the others and attempt to imitate. 'Ok, I got this' I thought 'I just cup my hands, receive the oil and then bring my hands up and over my head.' So there I was, receiving the oil, and in that split realized if I put my hands over my head, I would have hot oil all over myself. So, I went ahead and splashed the oil over my face and glasses and continued the motion completely over my head. I felt the ashram director give me a strange look but ignored it and kept on my way to the Prasad. With oil still dripping from my face, I asked Emily about the oil and all she replied with, "Oh, Kelsey, you are supposed to drink it."

July 4th, 2016

"The day you become courageous enough to enter into your being you have become a sannyasin. Sannyas means now you are taking your life into your hands. Now you are trying to live the life that is yours, authentically. Now you are no longer playing roles. Now you will not allow anybody else to write the story of your life. Now you are ready to unfold that which you have always carried like a seed within you" (Osho 67).

This speaks to an epic discovery I've been meditating on for most of this trip. I am completely and entirely dependent of others opinions of me. That has been the core of my life. In school, I want to be perfect, best grades. In my social life- I can't have one enemy- all humans must find me worthy and lovable. I am constantly adapting myself for the benefit of others. This notion came up strongly in my travels in India because I found myself being swayed by others opinions of where I should go- what I should see- how this experience should turn out. Funny enough, I feel like even my personal expectations or fantasies of this trip were based off of other people's opinions- how many truly were my own?

I'm finally starting to understand and accept my obsession with others' thoughts and opinions. It has driven me for so long. I don't want to completely lose my sensitivity to others because that definitely makes me who I am, but I need to find a better balance in that part of my life.

Where 'be-longing' began

Leading to this evening, I had never felt more physically uncomfortable or anxious. To venture into a realm that feels absolutely foreign and to read it to a room of peers created an unreal amount of tension. I am proud that I went through with the evening performance. The amount of sleepless nights around my lack of confidence gave me an important insight inside myself; I observed the way I react to the surrounding people and the thoughts I assume they are thinking. It is vital to do the things you are not comfortable with. As Marina Abramovic states, "if you make a drawing with your right hand and become better and better at it to the point of virtuosity and to the point where you can make the drawing with your eyes closed, you should immediately switch to your left hand" (Abramovic 16). In my mind, there is always room to grow and to learn, reaching a finite level of wisdom is impossible. To feel as uncomfortable and unsure as I did in writing this narrative was invaluable for my ability to create.

Through this evening of storytelling, this time to curate and share, my questioning of the word 'belonging' became clear. I found myself intrigued specifically by the paradox of the word, when you *long*, you cannot *be*. My colleagues also observed that traveling is an activity I pursue to further understand 'home.' I noticed the attachments physically and mentally weighing me down while abroad. I meditated on the times I was longing and times I could just be while in India. I continued questioning impermanence. I started to accept that water dictated my choices. In this part of the process a cyclical motion began. It started within myself, came out into the present room and returned with greater observation and insight back within. I had desired to understand my internal choices and thus found a useful way to dig inside and further see.

So what happened to India? My thesis was never about India. I used that as a personal journey, as a time to listen, observe and breathe. "The mind of the beginner is empty, free of the habits of the expert, ready to accept, to doubt, and open to all the possibilities. It is the kind of mind which can see things as they are, which step by step and in a flash can realize the original nature of everything" (Suzuki 13). I didn't take possessions from the country to make my own; I was never trying to reproduce a place that I had traveled to within an installation space. Instead, I took the ideals and observations I was constantly discovering and let that infiltrate slowly into my inner being. India is within this thesis as the journey I took resides within me.

Should we be governed by our intuition?

I am uncomfortable with the expected. I resisted calling my final project an installation for as long as I could. In reality, this thesis was always an installation but in deciding my personal definition of the word (an activation of space), I was able to free myself. With the word belonging, I started to visually explore ways to create the paradox of the word on a body. As a trained costume designer, my thoughts are rooted in bodies and the extension of garments interacting in a space. Thinking of tension, I imagined a 'Chinese finger trap' game. The more you pull and become frustrated, the more the object tightens. How could I create that same effect with a garment?

There is a garment that resembles a ball gown, larger than expected. The wearer slowly exits the ocean, the waves crashing around a large netted skirt that attracts all that comes in contact. The top drags the wearer back down into the sea...

I saw this gown repeatedly, a visual metaphor for belonging, attachment and presence. It took me a few weeks to finally understand that this was the next step, the seed to start my installation because it felt so far away from India. This dress I kept seeing had nothing to do with the country, but what I didn't understand at the time was it had everything to do with my experience while there. The process of creating an installation that begins with something like a dress or object is one I've been meditating on since my first year of graduate school. How do you practice being a generative designer? How can we create and contribute as fully to the process and journey of each piece? More specifically as a costume designer, I have been asking how my design can begin a narrative.

It is fascinating me that there are so many ways to approach work. I am someone who has a hard time expressing myself in words, so thinking in the way of images is a new and intriguing notion.

Maybe the words flower from an image?

I'm excited to keep destroying and remaking the processes I am used to or have found successful in the past

(Vidic, *Collaboration*)

The paradox of the word be-longing and the visual metaphor that would become a wearable garment began the installation, *Adrift*.

Illustration 1: Charcoal rendering of the dress, rendered by Kelsey Vidic



What is the ritual of belonging?

I am creating a performative costume, which is a metaphor for belonging

The best space for me to begin my process is a square room, completely painted white and open to any possibility. In this blank space, my hand leads my brain. As soon as I discovered the material nylon horsehair, it felt as if all had fallen into place. Nylon horsehair is used when creating historical garments for the stage. It is sewn on the inside of skirts that need an added stiffness to the outer hem. For me, this was the material that would express tension. Horsehair is woven in a way that expands and contracts similarly to the 'Chinese finger trap game.' This acted as the bodice on the garment. In researching multiple types of netting, I found that I wanted one with a plastic quality like the nylon horsehair, but also possessed large holes. I found a deer-block netting at Home Depot that filled these requirements.

Discoveries with the deer-block netting:

The incredible sound when it drags on pavement and becomes stuck

Doesn't collect materials as easily as I had imagined

Half floats, half sinks in water

Looks incredible in wind

I need *a lot*

Real net vs. the shadow of net vs. the projection of net is visually identical

Entering the hanging net creates loss of depth

Light on net is reflective and intriguing

There is a desire to curl up inside the net, to nest

I spent a weekend in October playing with the horsehair and netting materials. I displayed my process on large butcher paper and let my thoughts visually consume the blank, square room. I created a half scale version of the dress and decided I wanted to film this dress in spaces where water was present. Film is a way to involve literal spaces that can't be brought indoors. I wanted to investigate this notion and bring the natural world inside. Water needed to be

present in the final installation. I spent time wondering, what if I spent all this time filming and the footage was utterly useless for the installation? This outrageous thought felt very real in the moment. Instead of dwelling on this thought, I pushed forward.

In touching and draping the textiles in the blank space, the netting had a personality of its own, a personality devoid of emotion. The net picks up and snags on what it passes over and the human wearing that dress is forced to deal with those consequences. I was curious what attachment meant in the context of a human and the nonhuman garment. What are the attachments we collect that we don't intend on collecting; yet continue to drag along? I was attached to this question of collection for some time. Objects visually carry incredible amounts of meaning. I lost myself in trying to find a single object that I could acquire in bulk that would represent attachment but not specifically lead the viewer to a specific story. Eggshells? Nuts or Screws? Trash? Pens? Instead of being paralyzed in this question I could not find an answer to, I decided to keep moving forward. In the final installation, this object returned through serendipity, the object of leaves. Filming in outdoor spaces such as the Greenbelt, the dress collected leaves, twigs, green algae, and sometimes even small fish (which I of course set free). I released my contrived notions of what the dress should collect and let the dress collect what it unemotionally desired. In the final space, I left the nature in the garment it had already collected.

The dress and its collection of objects is a larger metaphor for my journey. "The nature of the mind is to interpret nonessentials essential. The mind creates artificial needs, believing it cannot live without them. In this way we carry a great burden of attachments throughout our life. Attachment is itself a great burden on our minds. We may never understand the extent of the burden till... we're free of it" (Swami 188). There are thoughts, ideas, or burdens we carry through life. Whether we are journeying thousands of miles away or just walking outside our door, we pick up and carry things along with us. Most of the time these items we

take live unconsciously inside us while we unemotionally leave things where they belong. It is interesting to note that we are constantly picking up and dropping off bits of ourselves, bits of others. All of these seeds eventually combine into creating who we are whether we notice it or not.



Illustration 2: Ganesha in net, Photo by Yitai Chung

Illustration 3: Observing shadows, Photo by Yitai Chung





Illustration 4: Half-scale of the dress, Photo by Yitai Chung

Illustration 5: Thoughts through netting, Photo by Yitai Chung



Can a dress consume a space or is it consumed by space?

*Revisiting the same ideas over and over,
finding new answers to the same question.*

*We return to it because it is
unanswerable*

(Santa Maria, Google Doc)

The next step was filming in the dress. I knew that I wanted to be within nature and more specifically around water sources. I needed to find a cinematographer that was excited to experiment and live in this process I created for myself; a collaborative partner that understood my desire to respond to intuition and to share the flowing journey. I asked Eloise Santa Maria, someone I had worked with on past film sets and had a strong feeling would be the perfect person. On the first meeting with Eloise, we discovered our mutual process of creation and I knew instantly this was the perfect match.

To leave room for serendipity within filming, there must be an incredible amount of research and preparation. There should be a balance between experimentation and preparation, but in contrast, I believe it is impossible to over prepare for the experiment. “Despite its thousand faces, the river takes on a single destiny; its source takes both the responsibility and the credit for the river's entire course. The strength comes from the source” (Suzuki 151). In this particular process, Eloise and I sat down together for three separate meetings and created a Google document where we could share research and comment on each other's thoughts.

*“After re-watching videos of Wolfgang Leib I was reminded of a central theme in my life, anxiety vs. meditation. I realized this is probably where the tension and pulling of the dress came from and therefore the overall aesthetic of this video can be grounded by **meditation within anxiety.**”*
(Vidic, Google Doc)

We created the world, the rules and intentions within the film. The factors controlled and planned were the locations, specific actions I would be doing in the dress and the overall aesthetic and feeling. We decided to focus on meditation, anxiety and the combination of both. Still water, close-ups with no movement and careful, intentional movement would express meditation. Anxiety included thrashing within still water, tension or pulling on the dress, close-ups with movement and rushing water. We would find a balance between meditation and anxiety by using the binary of water and solid materials such as a rock holding itself against a rushing stream. Or, during the act of climbing, tension and anxiety lived within the controlled and powerful movements to climb a boulder. We discussed the ritual of the dress, what does it mean to take it off or put it on? How can the intentions of those actions change depending on the environment or mood of the wearer? When does the dress envelop the landscape, when does it envelop the wearer? Is the dress a source of home, a nest, or is it foreign in that space? We strived to always find a balance.

We filmed four full days, two at the Greenbelt, one in a bathroom, and the final in a blank, white-walled shed. I also filmed footage while I was in El Paso, Texas, climbing at the Hueco Tanks State Park. I find my home within water; I find calm in that which is always propelled forward by motion. I feel most comfortable when I am adrift. "Thus water will appear to us as a complete being with body, soul and voice. Perhaps more than any other element, water is a complete poetic reality" (Bachelard 15). The notion of using water in this thesis was always present in subtle ways. From the fact that I traveled through India by following the southeastern coast, to deciding to film near water sources intuitively, water became a common thread. Fast forwarding to the installation, water actually became the inspiration to the overall structure. Without fully understanding why water in the first place, I discovered through the process that this element lives deeply in my current expression.

Being the designer and wearer of the garment

One of the most important choices made in this project was for me to create and perform in the dress during the filming process. It created urgency for me to be as clear and communicative with Eloise as she was not only the cinematographer, she was also a second director. I asked her to do this project because I innately trusted her as much as I trusted myself. It was never comfortable shooting at the Greenbelt. From entering spring water that was too cold, to walking across rocks barefoot and struggling my way up paths that were overgrown with trees and foliage, nothing about the activity I was doing embodied calm. Instead, the calm came from our own energies. Within the moments of frustration, when Eloise needed to film something again and my body was giving out, I understood in a deeper way what it felt like to be a performer in an unnatural garment. I was the body that had to walk over large rocks whilst constantly tripping, and then do it all over again, three more times. In my career as a designer, we are creating garments that are often foreign to the actor within. Being able to wear and perform in a garment of this scale and impossibility gave me insight into speaking with performers in future situations.

I discovered the dress I created. I found innumerable ways to take it off and put it back on again. The act of dressing and undressing is impossible to limit to one single meaning. Sometimes I wanted to take it off in frustration, other times I would slowly and carefully take it off so it could nest on the shore. I learned how it felt to wear a light yet enormous dress. I understood how it felt when it jolted your whole body because it was caught on a tree. I nested within the dress. I discovered how to bunch up the dress and treat it like an object I was carrying. I let it free and let the object carry me along. I felt it drift past me as the waters rushed forward. I thrashed it around, hearing the wind whistle. I took time to clean it, picking out leaves and debris. I asked questions and tried tasks. Later in the process, when I would pass on the garment, a base of knowledge already

existed. It led my collaboration with the future performer, Kelsey Oliver. When she had questions about the dress, what it could and couldn't do, I was able to speak from experience and not assumption. Being the performer was a valuable lesson.

Every day I worked on this thesis, my interior goal was to truly enjoy the process. Being an artist and having the opportunity to create is a gift. If this project were not enjoyable, then why would I make it at all? I invested in making sure my collaborators were finding something in this project for themselves. I believe having this mindset made these arduous days satisfying. We would be outside for eight to ten hours, just the two of us lugging around equipment and a dress that snags on absolutely everything. Yet, I only have incredible memories. I think I was able to maintain a sense of calm and grace during the filming because of the trust that existed.



Illustration 6: Adjusting the dress, Cinematography by: Eloise Santa Maria

Illustration 7: Preparing for meditation, Cinematography by: Eloise Santa Maria



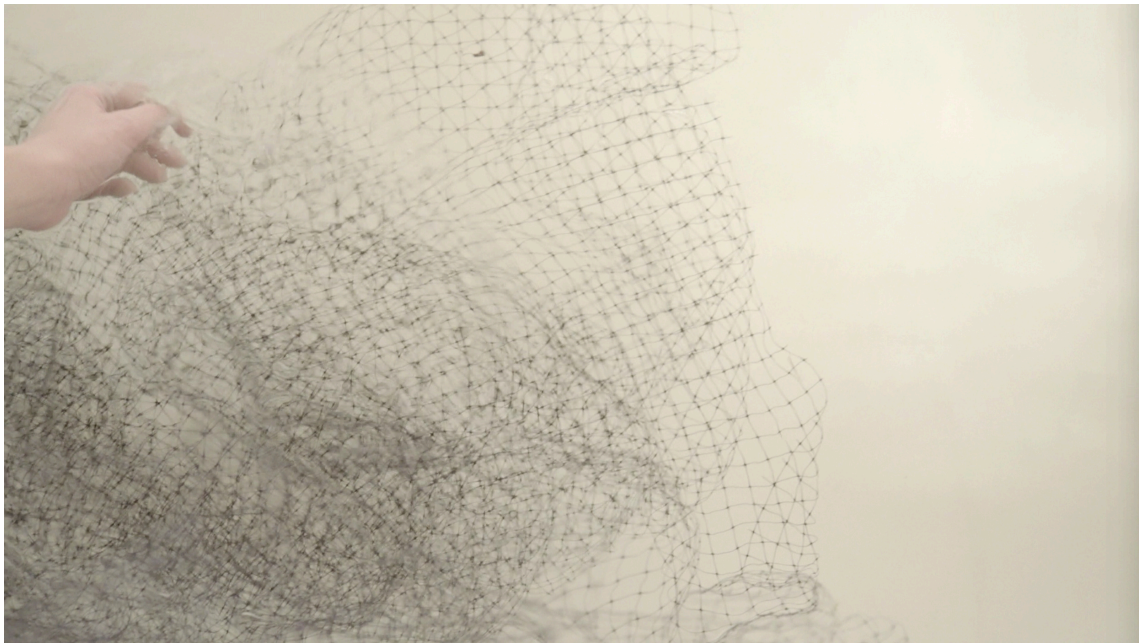


Illustration 8: Hand in water with dress, Cinematography by: Eloise Santa Maria

Illustration 9: Walking across river, Cinematography by: Eloise Santa Maria





Illustration 10: Taking off dress, Cinematography by: Eloise Santa Maria

Illustration 11: Washing dress in bathtub, Cinematography by: Eloise Santa Maria



Is there grace within conflict?

The space to suspend

“Art needs to learn from reflections, and music from echoes. By imitating that we invent. We think we conform to reality and, instead, we translate it into human terms” (Bachelard 193).

Winter break was a time to observe, to readdress, to question, to read and to pause. After spending time constantly doing and collaborating, to be solitary was challenging. Yet, this was the first time my process really felt it was leading to a final destination. When meditating or sitting for a very long time, the legs will commonly fall asleep. The moment the leg regains its normal position and blood rushes down, you find yourself extremely uncomfortable. The pain is so foreign; it feels as if the leg will never be the same or will fall off the body. And then, it is fine. It is comfortable again and there is a new realization that living through these intense moments can bring you to a newly enlightened point.

During this break, I had time to pick up the books and the freedom to read what I found enjoyable. One book that completely solidified this journey was *The Beginner's Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki. This book explaining Zen practices put together puzzle pieces in my brain that I could not previously fit together. A discovery that truly landed was that in this practice, calmness lives within activity. “Actually water always has waves. Waves are the practice of the water. To speak of waves apart from water or water apart from waves is delusion. A mind with waves in it is not a disturbed mind, but actually an amplified one” (Suzuki 35). In the filming process, we had touched on combining meditation with anxiety, yet I was constantly stuck on those two ideals being separate. It is easy to believe the world exists in contrast. To observe and understand that the truest calm is found in high activity was a revelation.

Finding a source that supported the path I was already taking propelled me to finalize what the installation would encompass. I had secured a space, the Museum of Human Achievement, and started bringing on collaborators to assist me in realizing the physical space. I had to leave the experimentation stage and transition into achieving a tangible project. First came the structure of the installation. I knew there would be a live performance within the installation because there needed to be someone in the dress. Therefore, the installation could only be open for a certain amount of time, not all day or night. I had a desire to experiment with duration and repetition during both the videos and performance and in making that choice, I also wanted to give the audience the choice to stay or leave, not force them into remaining for a show.

I then moved to the ground plan. I created distinct spaces based on the video and themes that were arising from the footage. I chose a nesting area, a journey hallway, and a main space that represented the internal state of the performer. These represented three spaces evident in my journey while in India. The nest represented this portable home, this notion or idea of home. The journey hallway was the ever-continuing path that is taken. The internal space left room for the thoughts culminating within.

I finally landed on the idea that installation would take on the structure of water. I took the concept of meditation and anxiety living simultaneously and applied that to the tone and structure. I wanted to resist the urge to use an Aristotelian structure and instead find a constantly flowing and fluid one; a place the audience could enter and exit without feeling as if they missed a key moment. I felt confident in where I was headed yet kept reminding myself to stay open and ready to receive with new collaborators.

Workshop in January

I am blessed to have a life-long collaborator, Emily Wolfe. From randomly assigned roommates our freshman year of undergraduate schooling to completing our Honors in the Major thesis together our senior year, we are continually growing together as artists. She traveled with me to India the summer prior and then flew down to Austin for this workshop. Emily is a choreographer and dancer, so her expertise in the room with the performer, Kelsey Oliver, was incredibly welcomed. The three of us spent half days finding the specificities within the structure of the live performance.

We began the week in a common way that I've seen choreographers begin. Emily brought in my writing from the *Traveling is IT* performance and we created phrases together based off the words by creating gestures. By the end of the day, we had a phrase to experiment with. The next day we created a structure that included specific intentions and tasks to complete that filled one hour (and would be repeated three times to create a three hour performance). Coming out of these seemingly successful days, both Emily and I became unsure of where we were headed. Deep down I kept yearning for simplicity. I had been observing my natural tendencies to overcomplicate, to add and to saturate a space and character. After having read Suzuki's book and thinking back to the artwork and installations I found most inspiring, I made the choice to push for simplicity.

This performance we were creating felt like a dance. It was becoming an engaging performance, instead of a space activated by a performer. Emily and I had several tough conversations in order to move forward. When working with collaborators, it is easy to let ego get in the way. Sometimes we get caught up in thinking our ideas are a representation of the self. It is offensive to hear your idea is not working because it is attached to your emotions. Instead, a collaborator should understand that an idea is a fleeting concept, sometimes it works and

sometimes it doesn't. It usually has nothing to do with you and should always have to do with the project. Luckily, we found a way to put our egos aside and find the correct path to continue on.

Emily is well versed in contemporary dance, and I am further saturated in installation work. I wanted this space to represent one, "of finding oneself 'here and there' at the same time...hovering, floating above this life and the situation in which one finds one's self... half-sleep...the world of semi-illusion...day-dream, while simultaneously preserving total control over yourself" (Kabakov 280). We were finally able to understand each other when I brought up Ann Hamilton's work, more specifically the work *tropos*. A single performer sits on a bed of horsehair while they 'read' a book in front of them by burning the words they read. The way that she uses a performer in her space is almost like using a gear in machinery. The performer is there to contribute to the space, not specifically create a performance for the viewer. The performance they are doing is repetitive and durational. We finally had two extremes on our scale, one end being a contemporary dance performance and the other being a performer that was essentially a cog in a bigger machine. I wanted to find a balance of these two forms and Emily supported and facilitated that decision.

I turned back to the filming that was already in existence from the month's prior. What themes from the videos were vital? How could that be translated into the performance? I keyed in to the three spaces I chose to represent in the installation (the nest, the journey hallway, the internal space). These three grounding principles made it clear what needed to stay and what could go. Edit, edit, edit. I wanted Kelsey's performance to be as simple and clear as possible so the audience could then drift away into their own narratives.

During the rehearsal process, I specifically invited the collaborators for the final installation to view the three-hour performance. Kimberly Belflower came to the Friday and Saturday workshop days. The first day she experienced the performance, there were many questions, the bulk of which she didn't ask and

agreed to talk about when we could sit and think together. The next day she came, Emily and I had simplified again. After this hour-long performance, she expressed that every question she had was no longer a question; instead of questions, she would see Kelsey do a repetitive movement and find herself internally reliving a time past that the movement had triggered. “The atmosphere that surrounds him concentrates attention, focuses him to submerge in recollections, to move in his thoughts from one level to another, after all, such a correctly constructed installation should ‘function’ on all levels: from the most banal, profane to the highly intellectual, ‘spiritual’” (Kabakov 248). Through constant editing and constant questioning, we started with a dance piece and ended with a performative installation where the audience had space to reflect and listen.



Illustration 12: Kelsey Oliver discovering the dress, Photo by: Alex Hanna

***When you are Adrift, can you cling onto something that is
Adrift itself for support?***

We had five days to install at the Museum of Human Achievement. That included two days of load in, a dress rehearsal, and two evening performances. At this point, I brought together a team of collaborators to assist with the install:

Joe Cornelison: Sound Designer
Jay Roff-Garcia: Sound Install
Chris Conard: Technical Director
Alex Hanna: Lighting Designer
Jon Haas: Projector Install

Managing a team for this installation forced me to be direct and to overly prepare. I had to have answers, to speak clearly. Everyone I asked to be a part of this thesis I trusted and admired and it pushed me to be as knowledgeable as I could going into every meeting.

Discoveries made while being in charge of a team:

- The importance of bringing in material as soon as possible;
instead of fearing what could be wrong,
it will lead to finding what is right
- Subtle lights create intimacy
- The value of being able to play in the space and bring in too many ideas
- Bringing in ideas while expecting them to change, finding the stability while
being adrift

With this team of incredible artists and the preparation we did in advance; the two-day install went smoothly. There was a hazy, space-themed music video being shot on the other side of the wall, but it only added to the upbeat energy we fostered. Everyone had clear expectations and therefore all the jobs were completed and ready to go by our first dress rehearsal Monday evening, February 27th, 2017

Adrift, the final installation, a description

“In this sense the total installation is a place of halted action, where some sort of event was occurring, is occurring and may occur” (Kabakov 246).

I begin in a gravel lot. I walk through the door into a room with a stage and old, orange, theatrical chairs. The space is blocked by folding doors; a light shines through the frosted panes. This hallway leads me up a set of stairs. On the left, there is a plaque describing the installation, a guest book, and some flyers. On the right is a charcoal rendering of a woman.

I enter.

I see black vertical beams and netting in clumps, littered with leaves across the room. There is a projection in the center pointed to the back wall. The images projected are close-ups and textures, all coming in and out of focus.

I hear water; I hear texture.

There is a space divided by a loose piece of silk to my left. It breezes along with the movement of others. A projection is present on the silk as well as the wall behind it. Walking into this space I am enclosed by the projection on either side. This involves a woman moving deliberately,
constantly moving forward.

A live performer now moves in front of the gauze.

She wears a large, black dress. The top is like a soft armor, the bottom like clouds of smoke; clouds of smoke that smolder over the wooden floor. With every step I hear a crackle, as if there were a fire present. The skirt clings to the wood and immediately lets out a ‘ding’ as the tension becomes too strong.

Her movement is deliberate, graceful and repetitive.

She walks toward an oval mirror opposite the wall projection of close-in texture. I wander over to the black, vertical beams adorned with netting and debris. There is a video playing on the floor. The dress is being cared for; the wearer carefully picks out leaves and twigs. The dress is living

as a nest; the dress is acting as a home.

I turn my attention to the others in the room; they seem adrift themselves. Some are sitting on the carpet pieces, lost in thought. Maybe they are lost in the video, or sound, or performer. I am lost within them, what are they thinking? I feel calm and tranquil. I feel open; my thoughts drift.

Perspective. Meditation. Tension. Snapping. Delicacy.
I am not sure how long it has been. Maybe it's time to go.

We are all currently adrift.



Illustration 13: Kelsey looking in mirror, Photo by: Yitai Chung

Illustration 14: Observer in journey hallway, Photo by: Yitai Chung





Illustration 15: Journey hallway projection, Photo by: Yitai Chung

Illustration 16: Kelsey preparing for headstand, Cinematography by: Eloise Santa Maria



***“In a fog, you do not know you are getting wet, but as you keep walking
you get wet little by little.” (Suzuki 46)***

This was an experiment into the unknown process. Every story that is told deserves a process that is unlike the previous and unlike the future. It is not effective to find a singular way of creation if the goal strives to push forward. “But there is no certain way that exists permanently. There is no way set up for us. Moment after moment we have to find our own way. Some idea of perfection, or some perfect way which is set up by someone else, is not the true way for us” (Suzuki 111). From creating an installation to designing costumes for a theatrical show, the process deserves to be investigated and malleable. There should always be a balance present between preparation and experimentation. During this process, I constantly found I needed to prepare and analyze even when I felt like I had no idea what I was doing. Every step of the way I would openly observe and write where I currently was in the project. In doing so, I was only looking forward one step at a time instead of trying to see the final goal. The installation was an accumulation, and you only know what you are accumulating by the time you reach the end.

I reflect that most importantly, this project forced me to focus in on one project over the course of three years. As a designer, it is common to be on multiple projects at once, jumping back and forth between shows that you are collaborating on but not fully invested in as your own. Ownership and responsibility required as a designer lives in a much different place than this specific thesis. At least once a week, if not more, I would fantasize about completely giving up on the project. I would convince myself that this project didn't matter, I didn't matter, and all the steps I had taken didn't make any sense at all. In art and in life, it is extremely difficult to follow through with what you say you will do, and I honor all those that can. I said I would go to India and then create a performative piece. Spending time with myself, and focusing in on the

concept of belonging, was what I said I would do, and looking back I am proud of accomplishing that feat.

In the end, this thesis has pushed me to discover the artist within. It became evident that in my intense compassion for others I curate spaces that leave room for reflection, meditation and active listening. Through this discovery, I have decided that my next step will be applying for the Fulbright scholarship to return to India and also journey to Cambodia. I would like to continue my education and discovery of Zen and Buddhism as well as study in the cities in India that I connected to artistically. I find in speaking about meditation or reflection, a lot of my immediate society resists these notions. I know I have a long path to discovery within this realm, and as I find a deeper understanding, I hope to continue making installations and performance art that experiment with different forms of sharing these discoveries with others. It feels like a natural next step. I feel ready to apply for this giant scholarship because I now have the capacity to further express myself due to this reflective thesis.

What truly is presence?

'You know,' Irwin advised me one morning as we began talking about his movement toward the dot painting, the works that would command his attention between 1964 and 1966, 'you have to be careful in taking these things I'm saying and working them into too clear an evolving narrative. There's a danger in spelling these recollections out so lucidly that your reader gains the impression that at the time I knew what I was doing and where all this was leading in some sort of intellectual way. You have to make it very clear to anyone who might read your essay, especially any young artist who might happen to pick it up, that my whole process was really an intuitive activity in which all of the time I was only putting one foot in front of the other, and that each step was not that resolved. Most of the time I didn't have any idea where I was going; I had no real intellectual clarity as to what it was I thought I was doing. Usually it was just a straightforward commitment in terms of pursuing the particular problems or questions that had been raised in the doing of the work. **Maybe I was just gradually developing a trust in the act itself**, that somehow if it were pursued legitimately, the questions it would raise would be legitimate and the answers would have to exist somewhere, would be worth pursuing, and would be of consequence' (Weschler 89).

How can we live everyday as if this was the absolute last? The question I will continue to ask the rest of my life. How can work be created with complete presence and focus? I don't know if it is possible, nothing is ever complete, but I hope to keep discovering joy in every moment. To be able to have your focus and light directed to what is happening before your eyes is a life practice I choose to keep. I find passion in gifting others with self-reflection; I find joy in gifting those with the space to be silent, to listen and to practice patience.

This thesis was a journey. As a costume designer, I was journeying through multiple layers. The first layer involved textiles. I continued my journey to find new ways to communicate through the materials I encountered everyday. I explored using materials not always present in garment creation and found a way for a cheap, plastic material to create a graceful and beautiful garment. The second layer was a journey to a foreign place, my journey to India. I took a physical journey to a place I intuitively wanted to be. In accepting my desire to leave this country, I started to realize my need to see and experience things beyond my expectations. The final layer was a journey through myself. I have had a hard time finding the value in sharing my experience. Coming into this program, I was ready to only share others' stories, to communicate any and every story that came into my path through the use of textile. Through my professors guidance and this thesis, I am finally finding a way to express myself and appreciate the way I communicate what I see. I understand now that through the cultivation of your own self, through the appreciation of your own life, you only become more ready to communicate the stories of others. As Marina Abramovic states, "My motto is very simple: I have to change myself. If I change myself, I can change thousands. You have to start with yourself. The answer doesn't come from anybody else." I have never experienced a more terrifying yet life-changing project thus far. I was forced to dedicate myself to a project for a full year and experience the desire to give up every step of the way. I focused in and meditated constantly on the fact that a project of my creation was not selfish. Through the creation of my own personal story, I have discovered an important inner belief; only through the realization of self and the ardent task of listening and observation can we truly hope to heal, change and live full lives on our own personal journeys of belonging.

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